

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000776

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INL, INL/AE, INR/NESA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05-13-14

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Counternarcotics Update: Recent large heroin busts; USG-funded training program off to solid start

Refs: Colombo 760, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Recent counternarcotics developments in Sri Lanka include police seizures of several large shipments of heroin in early May. In other news, the GSL is set to review the possible legalization of marijuana for certain medicinal purposes. Finally, a USG-funded training program with a strong counternarcotics element is off to a solid start and is poised to train a large number of Sri Lankan police officers in law enforcement techniques. The news on seizures is positive, indicating that the GSL is steadily improving its interdiction capabilities. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) RECENT SEIZURES OF HEROIN: Sri Lankan police recently seized large shipments of heroin in the following three incidents:

-- On May 5, police seized a consignment, which consisted of 7.9 kilograms of "brown sugar" heroin, near the town of Negombo, located 30 kilometers north of Colombo. Two men were arrested in connection with the case.

-- On May 11, two men were arrested with 9.2 kilograms of heroin in Marawila, which is in the Negombo area.

-- On May 1, five kilograms of heroin were discovered hidden in a shipment from India, and two individuals were arrested in Colombo in connection with the incident.

3. (C) All of those arrested in connection with the three cases are still in police custody. The cases represent the largest seizures of narcotics in Sri Lanka in 2004. Pujith Jayasundara, director of the Sri Lankan Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB), told poloff on May 13 that the recent seizures were a "major victory" in the GSL's efforts to combat illegal drug trafficking. (The PNB is the GSL's lead agency on counternarcotics matters.) The estimated street value of the three batches of heroin, according to Jayasundara, was Rs. 55 million, or approximately USD 550,000. News of the seizures was given high profile exposure in the local press, with photos of the illicit narcotics displayed prominently in English-, Sinhala- and Tamil-language newspapers. The seizures were also mentioned in TV and radio reports.

4. (C) GSL EXAMINES MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION: In additional narcotics-related news, the GSL is set to review the possible legalization of marijuana for certain medicinal purposes. Minister of Indigenous Medicine Tissa Karaliyadde stated at a press briefing on May 10 that his ministry was developing legislation that would legalize cannabis in Sri Lanka for certain medicinal purposes. W. Karunasena, secretary to the Ministry of Indigenous Medicine, confirmed to Pol FSN on May 13 that the ministry had tentative plans to introduce a legalization bill, though the details of the proposal were not yet firm. He allowed that he was unsure whether Sri Lanka's Cabinet would approve the draft bill, however. Karunasena noted that the proposed legislation had been prompted, at least in part, by many requests from aryuvedic physicians who use cannabis as part of their pharmacopoeia and want legalization to permit this practice. Several aryuvedic physicians had recently been jailed and/or fined for possessing the drug, Karunasena noted, and the ministry thought this was not fair. (Sri Lankan has thousands of aryuvedic physicians and they form a strong political lobby, especially at the village level.)

5. (U) UPDATE ON USG PROGRAM: A USG-funded police training program with a strong counternarcotics element has begun and is off to a good start. The series of training courses, the first of which began on May 3, will train several hundred Sri Lankan police officers in advanced tactics of drug investigation and criminal

investigation, among other topics. Funded by the Office of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), and valued at several hundred thousand dollars, the project is a cooperative effort sponsored by the Departments of Justice and State, through the Justice Department's International Criminal Investigation and Training Assistance Program, or "ICITAP." The program will run for approximately one year and has already drawn praise from police contacts, who have found the program invaluable in increasing the skill base of participants in law enforcement techniques.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The news on seizures is positive, indicating that the GSL is steadily improving its interdiction capabilities. To its credit, the PNB has been innovative: A highly-publicized program that offers cash rewards for information used to apprehend drug smugglers and/or suppliers has already netted several arrests and interdictions, for example. The USG-funded training course for the Sri Lankan police is further strengthening USG-GSL ties and, in the process, assisting the GSL's counternarcotics effort. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD